

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 INT-05 COME-00 IO-10 EB-07 DHA-02

TRSE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSC-05 IGA-02

AID-05 /073 W

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O 310950Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 3094

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA IMMEDIATE

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PLEASE PASS TO MINING ENFORCEMENT AND SAFETY ADMINISTRATION (MESA)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN, US

SUBJECT: INDIAN MINE DISASTER

REF: NEW DELHI 17371; STATE 304282

1. DCM, AID AFFAIRS OFFICER AND MINERALS ATTACHE MET WITH WADUD KHAN, SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF MINES/STEEL, AND HIS ADVISERS TO CLARIFY SITUATION REGARDING GOI REQUEST FOR DISASTER ASSISTANCE. AT THE OUTSET THE THE CONVERSATION HE EXPRESSED THE VERY GREAT GRATITUDE OF THE GOI FOR THE US OFFER OF ASSISTANCE. THE SECRETARY HAD ONLY YESTERDAY EVENING RETURNED FROM MINE SITE WHERE HE REPORTED TWO LOW CAPACITY PUMPS WERE ALREADY IN OPERATION AND SIX HIGH CAPACITY PUMPS (1200-1400 GAL/MINUTE) ARE BEING AIRLIFTED TO SITE FROM CENTRAL INDIAN COAL FIELDS. THEY ARE TO BE PUT INTO OPERATION VERY SOON. THERE APPEARS TO BE CONTINUED SEEPAGE FROM THE ABANDONED MINE NEARBY SO THE PROGRESS BEING MADE IN REMOVING WATER IS QUESTIONABLE AT THIS JUNCTURE. THE MAIN PROBLEM, HOWEVER, IS NOT THE NUMBER OF PUMPS, BUT ACCESS TO THE MINE WHICH LIMITS THE NUMBER OF PUMPS OPER-

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ATING TO 4 OR 5 AT ANY ONE TIME. WADUD KHAN SAID THAT THE GOI

MUCH DESIRED THE US PUMPS SO THAT THEY COULD REPLACE THE INDIAN PUMPS IF THE FORMER HAD A HIGHER CAPACITY OR IF THE INDIAN PUMPS BROKE DOWN. IN VIEW OF THIS SITUATION UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE WE FEEL ONLY THE INITIAL 5 PUMPS SHOULD BE SENT.

2. THE TWO KEY JOBS THE SECRETARY NOTED WERE (A) DEWATERING THE MINE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND (B) PROVIDING RELIEF TO THE FAMILIES. EVERYTHING ELSE IS SECONDARY.

3. THE SECRETARY SAID THAT INDIAN TECHNICIANS AT THE SITE BELIEVED THAT THEY HAD SUFFICIENT EXPERTS TO ASSEMBLE AND OPERATE THE PUMPS. HE SAID THAT POLISH EXPERTS WHO HAVE BEEN PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AT A NEARBY MINE AND ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE WORKING CONDITIONS AND OPERATING PARAMETERS OF THE AREA WERE BEGINNING TO ASSIST. THE DCM, SAID, SPEAKING AS A LAYMAN, HE DOUBTED THAT THE US WOULD WISH TO PROVIDE PUMPS WITHOUT EXPERTS TO ASSURE THAT THEY COULD BE ASSEMBLED RAPIDLY AND KEPT IN OPERATION. WADUD KHAN SAID, ALSO SPEAKING AS A LAYMAN, HE AGREED. THE DCM INFORMED THE SECRETARY OF THE TYPES OF EXPERTS WHO WERE PREPARED TO COME IMMEDIATELY TO INDIA. THE CONSENSUS AMONG LAYMEN WAS THAT THOSE TECHNICIANS WHOSE SPECIALITIES RELATED DIRECTLY TO PUMPING WATER OUT OF THE MINE WERE MOST APPROPRIATE TO ASSIST. THE DCM SAID THAT THE USG DID NOT WISH TO SEND TECHNICIANS WITHOUT A SPECIFIC REQUEST FROM THE GOI AND WADUD KHAN INDICATED THAT HE WOULD INQUIRE INTO THIS MATTER AND REPLY EARLY THIS AFTERNOON. IN THE MEANTIME, WE HAVE LEARNED THAT TWO US EXPERTS ARE ALREADY ENROUTE. (WE DID NOT TELL WADUD KHAN ABOUT THIS.)

4. WE ALSO WENT OVER IN DETAIL THE SPECIFICATIONS OF PUMPS. ACCORDING TO STATE 304703, WE PASSED ON THESE SPECIFICATIONS; PUMPS OPERATE ON 2060 VOLT, 120 AMP, 50 CYCLES (400 HP), AND REQUIRE A STEP-UP TRANSFORMER TO TAKE VOLTS UP TO 2060. GOI SAYS VOLTAGE IN AREA IS 3300 VOLTS AND WILL PROBABLY NEED A STEP-DOWN TRANSFORMER TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS. GOI IS NOW LOOKING INTO THESE ASPECTS ALONG WITH THE OVERALL US OFFER AND IS TO LET US KNOW WITHIN NEXT 4-6 HOURS IF (1) THEY STILL WANT US SUPPORT AND (2) IF SO, WHETHER THEY ARE ABLE TO COME UP WITH PROPER TRANSFORMERS. SINCE GOI FEELS SOME GAS MAY BE TRAPPED IN POCKETS AS THE WATER IS PUMPED OUT, THEY HAVE ALSO RE-EM-

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PHASIZED NEED FOR FLAMEPROOF PUMPS, WHICH WE INDICATED WERE BEING SENT. PLEASE CONFIRM THIS POINT. THERE IS ALSO SOME QUESTION OF FITTINGS AND PIPE BEING AVAILABLE LOCALLY FOR CONNECTING THE SUBMERSIBLE PUMPS 600 TO 1000 FEET BELOW THE SURFACE. WE PROVIDED OUTER DIMENSION AND THREAD (9 5/8" - 8 THREAD PER IN) FIGURES AND WADUD KHAN SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO THEIR CAPACITY TO ADJUST THIS TO INDIAN PIPE SIZES AND LET US KNOW THIS AFTERNOON.

5. WADUD KHAN SHOWED SOME SENSITIVITY ON THE SUBJECT OF AN AMERICAN PRESENCE AT THE SITE. WHEN THE REASONS FOR THE NEED FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE AID AFFAIRS OFFICER AND THE MINERALS ATTACHE WERE EXPLAINED HE READILY AGREED AND SAID THAT ACCOMMODATION AND COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES WOULD BE PROVIDED (TELEPHONE SERVICE TO DELHI, HE SAID, IS EXCELLENT). HE SAID THAT THE GOI WAS RESTRICTING PRESS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC ACCESS TO THE SITE AND WAS MOST RELUCTANT TO MAKE AN EXCEPTION FOR A USIS PHOTOGRAPHER TO TAKE PICTURES FOR RECORD. HE SAID THE GOI WOULD PROVIDE PICTURES AND WE AGREED. HE UNDERSTOOD THE US REQUIREMENT TO PROVIDE PERIODIC REPORTS TO THE USG BUT ASKED THAT THE GOI BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR COMMUNICATION TO THE PRESS WHICH WAS NOT BEING GIVEN ACCESS.

6. WE ASKED WADUD KHAN REGARDING WHAT ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN REQUESTED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. HE DESCRIBED THE POLISH HELP (SEE ABOVE) AND SAID THAT THE GOI HAD INQUIRED REGARDING AVAILABILITY OF EQUIPMENT FROM THE WEST GERMANS, THE BRITISH AND OTHERS. HE DID NOT MENTION THE RUSSIANS BUT PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THEY HAVE BEEN APPROACHED. HE SAID THAT THEY WERE STILL IN THE INQUIRY STAGE AND HAD NOT YET ACCEPTED ANY OFFERS.

7. IT IS CLEAR THAT WADUD KHAN DOES NOT EXPECT THE USG TO PROCEED TO THE POINT OF DELIVERY OF ANY EQUIPMENT OR PROVISION OF ANY EXPERTS UNTIL WE HEAR FURTHER FROM HIM. HE PROMISED TO BE IN TOUCH WITH US WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS.

8. WADUD KHAN CONTINUED TO EXPRESS REMOTE HOPE FOR SURVIVORS WHO MAY HAVE FOUND AIR POCKETS IN ONE OF THE TUNNELS. HE CITED AN EARLIER RESCUE EFFORT WHERE MINERS WERE RESCUED AFTER THIRTEEN OR FOURTEEN DAYS.

9. VIEW OF THE GREAT SENSITIVITY SHOWN BY WADUD KHAN TO PRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COVERAGE OF THE MINE DISASTER (WE EXPECT THAT THE FOREIGN PRESS WILL FILE STORIES WHICH ARE QUITE CRITICAL OF INDIAN SAFETY STANDARDS), THE EMBASSY STRONGLY REQUESTS THAT THE DEPARTMENT PROVIDE INFORMATION TO THE PRESS ABOUT ONLY THE US OFFER OF ASSISTANCE AND REFRAIN TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE FROM COMMENTING FURTHER ABOUT THE DISASTER ITSELF. OF COURSE OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH INDIAN OFFICIALS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED PRIVILEGED. SAXBE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISASTER RELIEF, MINING INDUSTRY, PUMPS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 DEC 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE17400
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750451-0269
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975121/aaaaaamw.tel
Line Count: 162
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 NEW DELHI 17371, 76 STATE 304282
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <06 AUG 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <06 AUG 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN MINE DISASTER
TAGS: ELAB, EMIN, EAD, IN, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006